

CIVIL SOCIETY DECLARATION

For the 60th session of the UN Commission on Social Development on the theme:

'Inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19 for sustainable livelihood, well-being, and dignity for all: eradicating poverty and hunger in all its forms and dimensions to achieve the 2030 Agenda'

Introduction

The global pandemic the world has endured in the last two years has dramatically exposed the systemic weaknesses of our social and economic systems, pushing hundreds of millions of individuals and families into poverty and hunger. These scourges, reflected in Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 2 respectively, are two of the most pervasive effects of human rights violations, and reveal a lack of consideration for human dignity and our shared humanity.

Before the global pandemic, there were 689 million people living in poverty in 2017 and 55 percent of the population did not benefit from social protections in 2016. In addition, 1.5 billion people could not afford the food and nutrition needed to sustain their existence. These challenges, further exacerbated by COVID-19, illustrate the extent to which poverty and hunger result from structural injustices and discriminatory systems.

Aptly, the priority theme for the 60th session of the Commission on Social Development is *Inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19 for sustainable livelihood, well-being, and dignity for all: eradicating poverty and hunger in all its forms and dimensions to achieve the 2030 Agenda*. This theme focuses our attention on the importance of transitioning into a society in which fundamental human rights are protected, structural inequalities are addressed, and discrimination and poverty are prevented. This decade should be remembered by our common effort in building healthy relations among all people and the planet, ensuring nutrition through sustainable food and agricultural practices, and respecting indigenous and grassroots knowledge to ensure everyone has equal opportunity to prosper.

Furthering the spirit of the Copenhagen Declaration (1995), in this last decade to achieve the SDGs, it is urgent that we recognize and address the structural and intergenerational inequalities affecting millions of people's access to quality healthcare, housing, education and employment. These fundamental human rights need to be realized through an intersectional approach of putting people at the center, to ensure that the dignity and wellbeing of all people are protected. We embrace the diversity of voices and lived experiences of those that have been left behind. We welcome the opportunity to advocate for their needs and demands, increasingly recognized in rhetoric but frequently overlooked in practice. COVID-19 has shed new light to the extent to which we are bound to one another by our common vulnerability and our shared humanity. **Now more than ever, solidarity has become a defining feature of how we must act; listening to and learning from unheard voices to ensure a just recovery from COVID-19.**

It is therefore important that we move forward with a *New Social Contract*, valuing inclusive collaboration and ensuring respect and dignity for the most vulnerable populations. This renewed commitment should prioritize the following actions:

1. Build Forward Better by ending discrimination and investing in human dignity and wellbeing

Hunger and poverty result from unjust political, economic, social, and cultural structures and power dynamics that are deeply entrenched and persist through generations. It is only through an intersectional and well-integrated approach, allowing for the establishment of national social protection systems and the systematic delivery of quality and affordable healthcare, housing and education, that we can invest in human dignity and wellbeing. A specific gender sensitive lens protecting the rights of women and girls should be applied across all sectors.

To access social protection and public services, one has to be recognized before the law. We must therefore emphasize the right to a legal identity, the need for equal recognition of rights, and equal protection and opportunity before the law, in order to end discrimination in all its forms.

2. End Hunger: Building resilience for food security everywhere

Conflict, climate variability, economic recessions and inequality are responsible for recent increasing rates in hunger and malnutrition. These, in turn, reflect the deeper systemic problem of policy being defined by profit and power. The local food producers are at the mercy of the corporate sector and suffer themselves from hunger and malnutrition, especially women farmers. The challenge is therefore to secure better and more equitable access to nutritious food, to avoid the consumption of cheaper, unhealthy and unsustainable food.

Food systems need to be strengthened by supporting sustainable agriculture and food practices. Essential to this is preserving local and indigenous knowledge in agricultural and food practices in tandem with distributing affordable and nutritious foods to build resilience in populations. Implicit in this recognition is the need to improve sustainable practices and promote synergies with the environment for a greener future.

3. Build towards a green recovery: decent jobs, green transition

Sustainable industries for green technology are paramount to ensuring a harmonious relationship with the environment. Healthy ecosystems sustain livelihoods and create new income streams and employment opportunities while enhancing resilience to climate change. By phasing out the carbon energy sector, investing in green technology, and the promotion of employment in green industries, we can transform unsustainable and precarious work into decent and dignified employment.

We must promote decent work, education and upskilling, with a focus on women and all workers in polluting and extractive industries. We must recognize the value of unpaid care work in the economy and in social well-being to support women, and particularly mothers, who assume the largest share of unpaid care work to the detriment of their income generating ability. We must abate discrimination and other barriers to decent and sustainable work, ensuring an inclusive, rights-based world of work and promote sustainable livelihoods for all.

4. Bridge the digital divide to access fundamental rights

In this digital age, new forms of inequality emerge through gaps in access to digitized public services and jobs, furthering the need for a Global Digital Compact. As we promote digital access as a fundamental human right to ensure the availability of affordable technology for all, we also recognize the importance of prioritizing digital literacy training to reduce the digital divide.

This implies the need for a non-discriminatory approach in North/South technology transfer across the private and public sectors. Moreover, accountability for Artificial Intelligence (AI) needs to be recognized in an ethical code to avoid the perpetuation of abusive practices through new technologies.

A Call to Action:

To address the Commission's Priority Theme, we the members of the NGO Committee on Social Development, call upon Member States to:

1. Invest in national floors of social protection comprising social security guarantees and ensuring all have access to essential health care and to basic income security, thus eradicating poverty and preventing vulnerability and social exclusion.
2. Establish a Global Fund for Social Protection to provide capacity to Least Developed Countries' to be able to maintain social protection floors in place.
3. Expand the availability of adequate housing, with special attention to the need of individuals and families experiencing homelessness for supportive services.
4. Ensure that persons living in poverty are equal before and under the law and are entitled, without discrimination, to the equal protection and benefit of the law; and take all appropriate measures to eliminating social stigma attached to the conditions of poverty, especially in the fields of education and work.
5. Scale up climate resilience across food systems, inclusive of the knowledge of the native environment, crops and farming practices held by indigenous peoples; intervene along the food supply chains to lower the cost of nutritious food, and improve sustainable practices to promote better dietary patterns with positive impacts on human health and the environment.
6. Strive for coherence between climate, biodiversity, disaster risk reduction and sustainable development goals, with the support of public work programs in green sectors; including investment in renewable energy production.
7. Promote decent work, education and upskilling for sustainable livelihoods for all, with a focus on women; and ensure that unpaid care work is supported through social protections to recognize, reduce and redistribute the nature of the work.
8. Eliminate discrimination and other barriers to decent and sustainable work, ensuring an inclusive, rights-based world of work for all, including the informal sector and promoting social dialogue and workers' representation in decision making.
9. Promote universal access to the internet as a right; and ensure access to digital technology and digital literacy for all people and nations.
10. Support North/South technology transfer, strengthening science and technology cooperation, promoting sustainable global and domestic investments in infrastructure capabilities.